

# The Problem is Essentially Human / So is the Answer

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Siddhartha Gautama, who is acknowledged as the father of the creed known today as Buddhism, was essentially human in origin. He was born of human parents in India, in the region of the the foot-hills of the Himalayas, nearly five centuries before the commencement of the Christian era. He was no divine emissary. All Buddhist creeds, severally known in different regions as the Theravāda, the Mahāyāna and the Vajrayāna now choose to refer to the founder as Sakyamuni or the sage of the Sakyan clan.

While this young man of Sakyan origin was yet only twenty-nine years of age, the father of a young son, born through a dearly beloved wife, he felt he had seen enough of the weak spots of the human predicament, of being born into this world and having to live it through various vicissitudes, of growth, decay and death. The care and comforts of a royal household, more than adequately provided by his father Suddhodana who was a provincial ruler of the Sakyan territory, could not veil from him the grim realities of human existence.

What was invariable and natural to all and sundry, through which all humanity is seen to be passing even without the batting of an eye-lid, overwhelmed him. It touched him to the core of his heart. The world, i.e. mankind, is plunged in great agony, he said [*Kicchaṃ vata ayaṃ loko āpanno*], in being born into this state of existence, in being dragged along through growth and decay, and ending up in death. But death does not terminate this process of life. In the invariable birth that follows, it re-starts all over again [*jāyati ca jīyati ca mīyati ca cavati ca uppajjati ca*].

But there in India of the Buddha's day, was something which we must immediately take note of. Stretching back to more than two thousand years even before the Buddha, there was some sort of religio-philosophical thinking in India

which addressed itself to problems with which man was beset. This was the age of the Vedas or Vedic thinking. Those men of a more wandering, and less settled stage of life, were overawed with what was happening in the world around them.

Natural phenomena like the sun, moon and stars, wind, thunder and rain seem not only to have overpowered them but baffled them to the utmost by their behaviour. It was too much for them to grasp. They felt completely helpless in their presence and felt and believed that whatever happened to them in life was brought about by these believed to be more powerful elements. These, they did not hesitate to elevate to the level of divinities who therefore had to be superhuman. This, at least as far as we can logically see, is the genesis of gods who preside over humans, formulated well before the emergence of the idea of a single creator god who turned out to be monolithic.

This had to naturally pass through phases of polytheism, more precisely termed by Indologists as henotheism or kathenotheism, each divinity being regarded as the supreme according to time and need. In all stages of this polytheistic thinking, man had to submit and surrender himself to the will of the gods. In their pleasure was his success and in their wrath, his disaster.

The Buddha in his view of the world and the place of man therein, much earlier in history, was more revolutionizing than Galileo. His focus of interest was more the man in the universe than the universe itself. The Buddha's greatness as a man who was to become an incomparable leader of men lay in his envisioning the possibility of terminating this vicious process in the world of humans which he termed a painful one or mass of suffering - ***dukkhakkhandha*** [*Kudā 'ssu nāma imassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa nissaraṇaṃ na paññāyetha.*].

The Buddhist spiritual quest, or more precisely the spiritual quest of the Buddha aspirant, begins here. It is an essentially human problem. It is a down-to-earth problem of what we see as the human predicament. Of what men, women and children have to face while being here as humans. From the imaginary and speculative, he turned to the visibly real. Where does Buddhism then find an

answer to this?

The Buddha does not turn towards an unknown world or an unknown person behind it to be the cause of this. He calls human life a psycho-physical process at work and whatever unhappiness is seen within it, is traced back to be a product of this process. Humans have to know, through reliable information conveyed to them through their religious teachings, the manner in which the life process operates. Through diligent understanding one has then to make the necessary adjustments in order to be completely in alignment with it. Thereby one reduces and eliminates conflict and the consequent friction which brings about the total disharmony in life.